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FBI probed report Oswald 'definitely' was informant

By EARL GOLZ

Former FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover personally ordered his top aides to "expedite" an interview in May 1964 with a Dallas FBI agent who was reported to have said that accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald was "definitely an FBI informant" and that files of the bureau in Washington "would prove this fact."

A Hoover assistant, C.D. DeLoach, got the informant report from Walter Jenkins, special assistant to President Lyndon Johnson, according to memos filed with FBI documents declassified last month.

Neither the Warren Commission nor J. Gordon Shanklin, special agent in charge of the Dallas FBI office in 1964, was told of the incident, which apparently was handled by Hoover's top aides.

The FBI has acknowledged its agents had contact with Oswald or his wife about four times before the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 but did not recruit him as an informant. The agency said it was interested in him because he had returned to this country in 1962 after defecting to Russia in 1959.

RESULTS OF the May 1964 interview with Will Hayden Griffin, the Dallas FBI agent referred to by Jenkins, were not released among the 40,000 pages of FBI documents made public last month.

An FBI spokesman told The News last week he understood the incident "didn't amount to anything" and results of Griffin's interview probably were placed in his personal file rather than in the assassination file.

Griffin, who retired from the FBI Jan. 1, said last week he did not make the statement as reported by Jenkins and said he is "convinced and always have been that he (Oswald) never was an informant for the FBI."

> "Will Griffin . . . knew the truth that Oswald was not an informant."

Griffin's name was blacked out in the two memos released last month but he confirmed he was the former New Orleans agent Jenkins referred to who was transferred to Dallas about 1960.

"He (Oswald) wasn't an informant because I knew the boys who worked with him and tried to work with him," Griffin said.

SHANKLIN SAID Griffin in 1963-64 was "handling applicant investigations" for clerical and other employment in the Dallas FBI office and was not involved in domestic intelligence work.

During the investigation after the assassination Griffin interviewed two of Oswald's co-workers in the Texas School Book Depository Building and also Oswald's landlady at the time of the assassination.

Before his retirement he was assisting in checking clearance for possible investigators and researchers for the House Assassinations Committee.

Griffin said he had never met Walter Jenkins but knew his brother, William R. Jenkins, who was an FBI agent in Amarillo in 1964.

Both Jenkins brothers told The News they could not remember the Griffin incident.

"I have no memory of any of that," Walter Jenkins said. "And if it was a serious matter that I really took seriously I would remember it, I think. It might have been some incidental thing that I really didn't believe and just passed it along."

ACCORDING TO A memo DeLoach wrote to another Hoover aide, Jenkins told DeLoach on April 29, 1964, that a friend whom Jenkins refused to identify had talked to the Dallas FBI agent who said he "assisted in the investigation of the Oswald case and that Oswald, prior to his murder, was definitely an FBI informant.

"The 'agent' stated that FBI files in Washington would prove this fact," DeLoach's memo said. "I told Jenkins that while I doubted very seriously that any of our agents had furnished this fact to his 'friend,' that at the same time we, of course, would make a check and find out if the description given this 'agent' fitted any of our people."

A second memo, dated May 4, 1964, was written by William A. Branigan, the FBI official in charge of the Oswald investigation, to William C. Sullivan, FBI assistant director in charge of domestic intelligence.

BRANIGAN SAID the agent, who by then was identified, would be interviewed in Dallas "to determine if he made the statement that Oswald was definitely an FBI informant." Kyle Clark, assistant to Shanklin, was instructed in Shanklin's absence "to promptly advise of the results together with their recommendations."

C.D. DeLoach . . . Handled probe of reported statements by Dallas agent.

J. Edgar Hoover . . . "entire control of whether a man shall be an informant."

J. Gordon Shanklin . . . "They got . . . stuff up there (Washington) I never heard of."

Hoover's initials were written at the end of the memo under the word "expedite" in his handwriting.

Two days after the May 4 memo one of Hoover's top aides, Alan Belmont, was scheduled to testify before the Warren Commission about the Oswald-informant question.

Belmont, in charge of all FBI investigative work, identified a letter dated Feb. 6, 1964, to the commission as a letter from Hoover "stating flatly that Lee Harvey Oswald was never an informant for the FBI."

One of the commission lawyers questioning Belmont, Samuel A. Stern, told The News he was "absolutely not" told of the Jenkins report at the time and had not learned of it afterward.

EIGHT DAYS after Belmont testified, Hoover went before the Warren Commission and said he had "entire control of whether a man shall be an informant or shall not be an informant" of the FBI. He testified he "can most emphatically say that at no time was he (Oswald) ever an employee of the bureau in any capacity, either as an agent or as a special employe or as an informant."

Hoover months earlier had ordered any members of the FBI who had contact with Oswald or his case to submit affidavits stating whether they had any information he was ever an FBI informant.

Neither DeLoach, Branigan nor Clark could recall the DeLoach and Branigan memos about the Jenkins report when questioned by The News this week.

"Knowing Will Griffin, I doubt very seriously he ever made such a statement because he had better sense," DeLoach said. "And he also knew the truth that Oswald was not an informant.

"I THINK WE gave the Warren Commission everything. We gave them everything as far as I know. I don't know anything that was held back from the Warren Commission."